

# THE ATWOOD IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH SITE, SANDERSTEAD, 1960

BY

R. I. LITTLE

**E**ARLY in 1960 construction work commenced on the site of the Atwood Primary School, Limpsfield Road, Sanderstead.<sup>1</sup> On 6 March 1960, the writer, accompanied by Mr. M. E. Farley and Mr. K. D. Hore, discovered extensive traces of Iron Age and Romano-British occupation in the foundation and drainage trenches. Permission was given by the County Architect, Mr. J. Harrison, A.R.I.B.A., to the Sanderstead Archæological Group to investigate the area thoroughly as the building operations progressed.

It was soon realised that whilst the Iron C and Romano-British occupation covered the larger section of the areas investigated, the Iron A and B site was mainly concentrated near the line of the prehistoric ridgeway running on the line of the present Limpsfield Road at this site. This concentration was in the form of numerous post holes and rubbish pits, all of which were located in drainage and electricity supply trenches cut through the school drive.<sup>2</sup> Time did not permit the examination and clearance of all of these pits. Twelve pits were recorded in this immediate area, of which only eight were fully examined. Their position clearly indicates the presence of other such pits on either side of the drive.

The rest of the site was also recorded by observations made over approximately one year, and was investigated with the co-operation of the contractors, Messrs. Lawdons Ltd. The Sanderstead Archæological Group only opened trenches where it was deemed necessary, relying otherwise on recording any pits, post holes and ditches revealed in the course of the numerous excavations essential to the building construction work. An account of these discoveries is given in more detail below.

No previous record exists of any other archæological material having been found here. The unearthing of a solitary urn cremation of the first century A.D. in 1943 at Wentworth Way, 400 yards south of the site,<sup>3</sup> is the nearest previous discovery, whilst the Romano-British settlement in Kings Wood is situated only half a mile to the east.<sup>4</sup> A short stretch of Roman road from this latter site intersects the prehistoric ridgeway mentioned above.

## *Summary*

We have here a small but established community lasting from the earliest phase of the Iron Age until the early Romano-British period

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<sup>1</sup> Nat. Grid Ref. TQ (51) 343605.

<sup>2</sup> *Sy.A.C.*, LVIII (1961), 112.

<sup>3</sup> *Sy.A.C.*, XLIX (1946), 112.

<sup>4</sup> *Sy.A.C.*, LVIII (1961), 35-46.

(second century A.D.). The surrounding finds clearly indicated that such a site as this settlement should be in the vicinity.

The structural finds consisted of pits, hut sites and ditches which were dated by means of the pottery and querns contained in their fill.

### THE STRUCTURAL FINDS (FIG. 1.)

With the exception of the group of Iron Age pits situated in the school drive, all of the structural finds were brought to light within the boundaries of the school. This is enclosed by a wire-mesh fence delimiting an area of approximately one acre. For convenience in recording, this area was split into three sections (see Plan, Fig. 1.): *Area I* is the section of the site cleared during the laying down of an asphalt playground, *Area II* is the section cleared and trenched prior to the erection of three prefabricated classrooms and a teachers' rest-room, *Area III* is where the main school buildings were erected some twelve months later.

### THE OCCUPATION IN THE EARLIER PHASES OF THE IRON AGE (IRON A AND SECOND B)

#### *On the Line of the Drive*

Upon the initial discovery of the site, two parallel trenches for supplying water and electricity to the new school were found open along the line of the school drive. These were completed and refilled soon afterwards, allowing only time for eight of the twelve pits recorded to be examined fully.

Pits 1, 2, 3 and 7 were not cleared. The pits which were excavated were small (about 2 feet in diameter and from 18 to 24 inches deep) and, except in the case of No. 11, were flat-bottomed and contained a dark fill, with in every case some pottery. Pit No. 11 was saucer-shaped and contained a lighter fill. The pottery from Pits 5, 6, 10, 11, 12 is described below (Fig. 2). Fragments of saddle querns were found in Pits 5 and 10 (see below, Page 38).

#### *Area I*

*Pit 13.* A small flat-bottomed pit was revealed by bulldozing in the north corner of the area cleared for the school playground. No contents.

#### *Area III*

*Pit 14.* Disclosed in the side of a partially constructed cess-pit as a shallow horizon of dark soil 8 feet in diameter by 2 feet in depth. This yielded two fragments of Iron Age pottery and part of a loom weight of indeterminate form.

*Pit 15.* Disclosed in another cess-pit. 3 feet by 3 feet with a concave base. It contained a large quantity of grey sticky clay with 21 struck flakes of flint, 4 'pot-boilers' and 4 sherds of crude pottery. Iron oxide from the clay subsoil had filtered through into the pit and congealed on the potsherds. These four sherds are described below (Page 37).

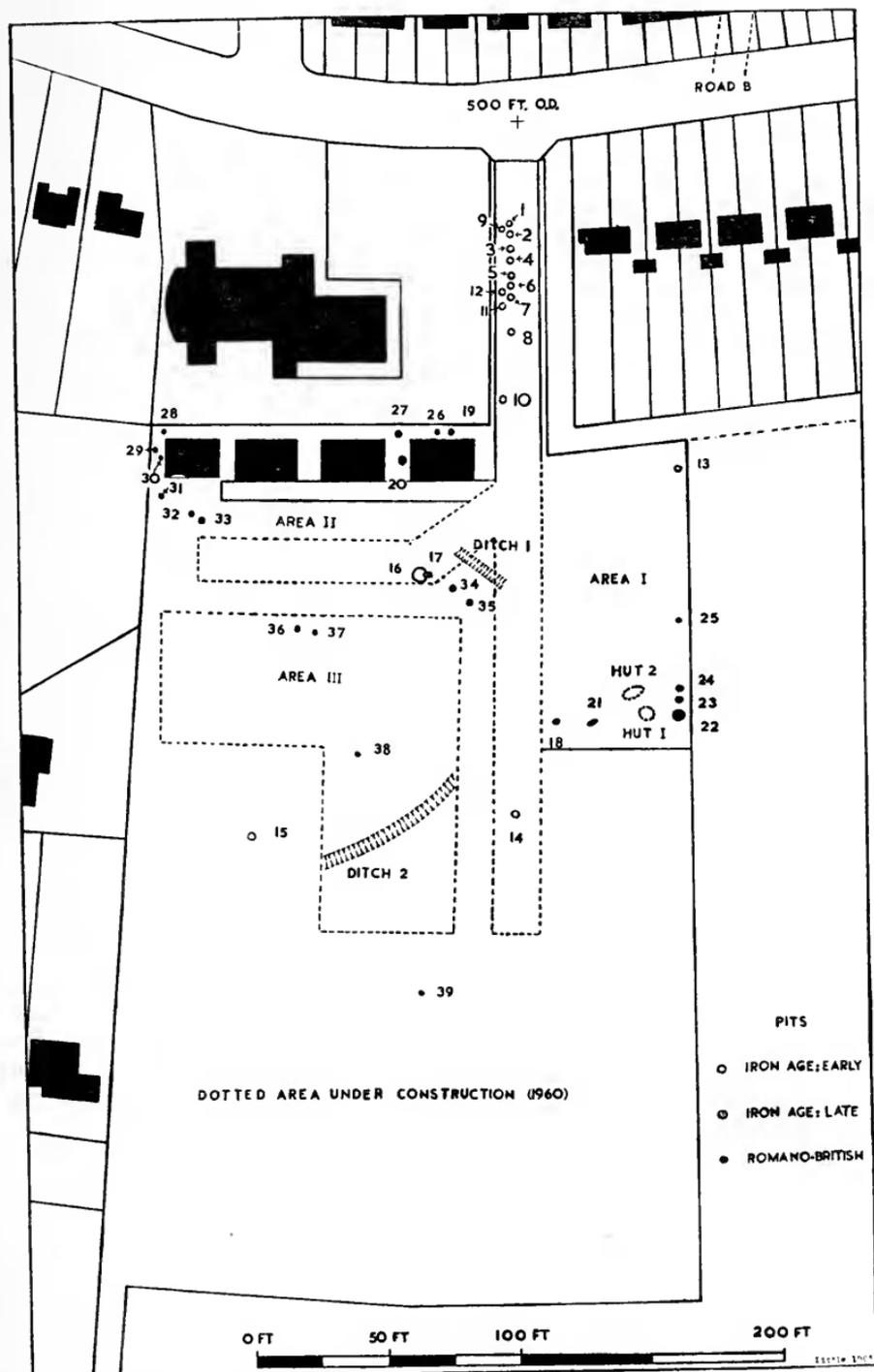


FIG. 1.—PLAN OF ATWOOD EARLY IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH SITE.

*Pit 16.* This was the largest Iron Age pit found on the site. It measured 7 feet in diameter by 4 feet in depth. The fill differed little from the natural subsoil, and the pit was only discovered whilst clearing a small Iron C rubbish pit found to be inserted into the side of this earlier pit. The fill consisted of minute flecks of charcoal, the jaw and other bones of an ox,<sup>5</sup> a few lumps of weathered chalk, a piece of burnt sandstone, iron slag, 'pot-boilers' and 64 sherds of Iron Age pottery (see below Page 37 and Fig. 2, 6).

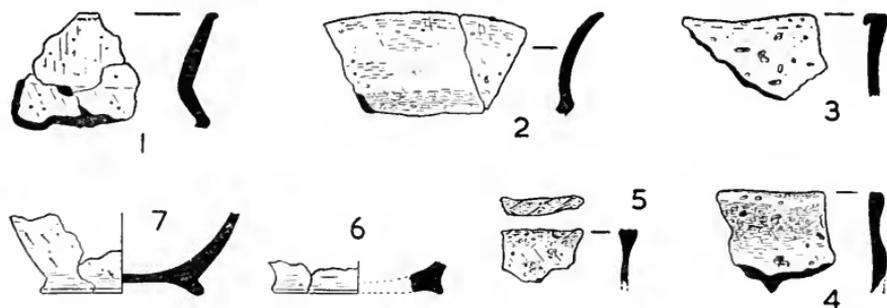


FIG. 2.—IRON AGE POTTERY FROM THE ATWOOD SITE. (4)

#### THE OCCUPATION IN THE LATEST PHASE OF THE IRON AGE (IRON C)

Four pits belonging to this phase were unearthed during the constructors' extensive bulldozing and trenching.

*Pit 17.* Road levelling revealed a small elongated pit which had been inserted into the upper level of *Pit 16*. This had a very dark filling containing quantities of charcoal and 14 fragments of Iron C pottery, amongst which was a piece of bead-rim jar. Also in the fill was a piece of burnt conglomerate, flints, and clay, all showing signs of having been subjected to heat.

*Pits 18 and 19.* These were two small pits with dark filling. From the first pit were recovered 18 sherds of a bead-rim vessel of a corky texture, eight pieces of daub and a burnt flint. The second pit yielded only two sherds of Iron C pottery.

*Pit 20.* This was revealed in a drainage trench and measured 5 feet in diameter by 4 feet in depth. Only two sherds of pottery were recovered from the fill, but in the spoil from the drainage trench were found an upper and lower quern stone of conglomerate. (See Page 38).

#### THE ROMANO-BRITISH OCCUPATION

##### *Hut Sites*

Two hut sites were recorded within a few yards of each other in *Area I*. Only one of these (*Hut 1*) was excavated, whilst the other was destroyed before it was examined fully.

<sup>5</sup> Identified by the excavator.

*Hut 1.* The laying of the asphalt playground involved the removal of 9 inches of topsoil. In the area thus revealed was noted a circular patch of dark soil which contrasted with the yellow clay which is the natural subsoil. This area measured 10 feet in diameter by 1 foot in depth. The dark filling was entirely removed but no post holes were discovered. This fill consisted of a rich mixture of charcoal, bones, pottery and the fragmentary remains of two quern stones.

The pottery, a selection of which is described below (Pp. 37-8, Fig. 3) dated from A.D. 60-150, but the main bulk dated from the last quarter of the first century A.D. Over 400 sherds of this date were recorded, including Samian ware, Castor ware and an overwhelming predominance of coarse ware of local manufacture. Of the last category the following types were found: bead-rim jars, storage jars, ollae, cordoned vases, 'pie-dishes,' feeding bottles,<sup>6</sup> imitation Samian ware. The ware was generally hard and sometimes gritty and in one case the surface was polished. Only six positive sherds were recorded of the second century within the fill. These included rim-less bowls, fine combed ware and a sherd of late second century reeded-rim vessel. Three pieces of a mortarium of first century date were also found.

Other finds from the hut filling were rather sparse and, apart from the quern fragments, consisted only of four square-sectioned iron nails, three struck flakes and a piece of iron slag.<sup>7</sup> The quern fragments are described below (Page 38).<sup>8</sup>

*Hut 2.* Ten feet north of *Hut 1* was the site of a small hut or building of different construction from *Hut 1*. This was the area of the initial discovery of the settlement. The mechanical removal of the turf had exposed a compact area of rocks, all foreign to the locality. These had been deposited three feet away from a chalk floor. This deposit consisted of pieces of ironstone, sandstone and decayed blocks of Greensand. Forming a foundation to this collection was half of a Niedermendig lava quern stone. By this, and resting upside down, was the base of a first century storage jar. Part of an ironstone quern showing signs of extensive use was found and also the shattered remains of a second storage jar.

The chalk floor, which measured 6 feet by 9 feet and was roughly oval, was buried only 9 inches from the surface of the field in which the site lay. It was cleaned and photographed and found to consist of a two-inch thick horizon of puddled chalk. A small hearth was located at its western end. There were no post holes through this floor. Scattered on its surface, and embedded in the chalk matrix, were 78 sherds from a single second century cavetto-rimmed olla of a grey, cross-hatched ware. Pottery fragments of 12 other vessels were also found. The structure which these remains marked may have been a rectangular timber building.

<sup>6</sup> *Sy.A.C.*, LVIII (1961), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Identified by the excavator.

<sup>8</sup> Numerous pieces of ironstone, which is not a local material, were found throughout the site.

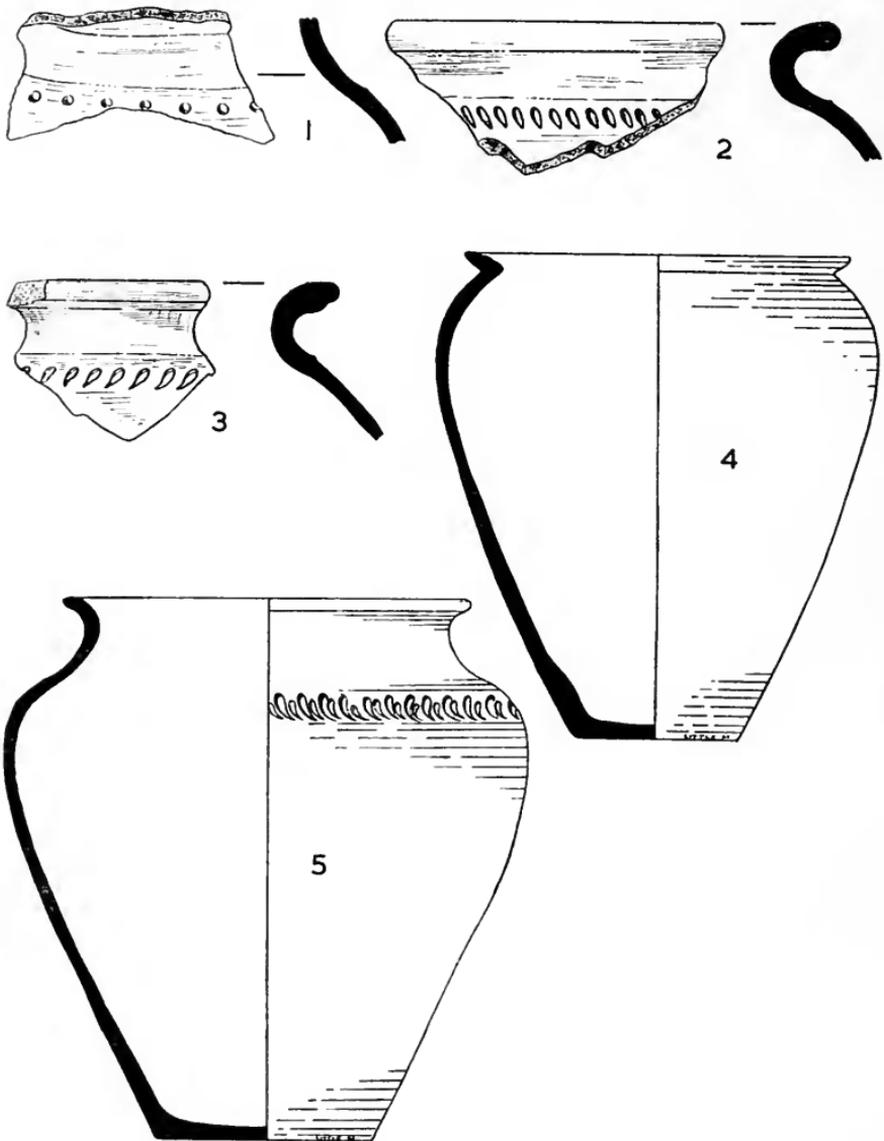


FIG. 3.—ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY FROM THE ATWOOD SITE. (4)

#### *Ditches*

Over 40 ancient intrusions were revealed in the subsoil over the site by cable, drainage and foundation trenches. Only in two instances was it possible to define the sections of the small ditches or gulleys which are so characteristic of sites of this type and period. Both of these were of a similar nature; relatively small and containing a dark fill.

*Ditch 1.* Only 12 feet of this ditch were traced and its sections examined. It measured 4 feet across by 2 feet 6 inches in depth.

Found in the fill were two fragments of early first century pottery, an iron nail and a piece of ferruginous sandstone.

*Ditch 2.* In the foundation trenches of the main school buildings a series of ditch sections were noted. These ran for over 70 feet in an east-west direction as opposed to the north-south run of *Ditch 1*. Unfortunately the rate of building progress prevented a more comprehensive examination being made. No pottery was therefore recovered. This ditch may connect with *Ditch 1*, though it is slightly wider, its measurements being 7 feet by 2 feet 6 inches.

### *Rubbish Pits and similar structures*

#### *Area I*

*Pit 21.* An elongated pit measuring 5 feet by only 1 foot in depth, and containing an intense black fill comprised of decayed vegetable matter and the remains of 8 pots of early first century date: a bead-rim jar, three storage jars and a jar, possibly with pedestal base, of black-coated pottery, decorated with cordons and cross-hatching.

*Pit 22.* Ten feet south-east of *Hut 2* the contractors cut through a large dark-filled pit. They salvaged a quantity of pottery, including, from their description, a large part of a bead-rim jar and a 'piece of a granite disc.' This material was unfortunately removed from the site and subsequently mislaid. From the sherds gleaned from the spoil heap it is certain that this large pit or small hut dated from the middle of the first century.

#### *Area II*

*Pit 27.* In a drainage trench was discovered a small pit 17 inches deep. This contained a large quantity of charcoal and calcined bone material. It was possible to ascertain that this calcined bone was human and apparently that of a child.<sup>9</sup> This insertion is similar to *Burial I* in Kings Wood.<sup>10</sup> No pottery was recovered.

*Pits 28, 30 and 35.* These were small pits which yielded no pottery or other finds.

*Pit 29.* A small pit with a clay filling barely distinguishable from the natural clay and containing the shattered remains of a badly eroded Samian patera of form 18.

*Pit 31.* A wide shallow pit measuring 12 feet across by only 1 foot in depth. This appears to have been an occupation level rather than an actual pit. Pottery of the middle of the first century was found, including a large sherd of an enormous storage jar of hard buff paste with walls  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick.

*Pit 32.* Only the barest traces of this pit remained due to the insertion of a man-hole.

<sup>9</sup> Identified by the excavator.

<sup>10</sup> *Sy.A.C.*, LVIII (1961), 39.

*Pit 33.* A pit of unusual form. One side was nearly vertical and the other sloped at 45 degrees, the whole being reminiscent of a ditch section. Further excavation on the line however failed to reveal any continuation. Pottery was recovered of the mid-first century.

*Pit 34.* In the side of a newly dug cess-pit was a small pit, chalk-filled. In the bottom was found a number of sheep bones, carefully deposited. No pottery was recovered, and this pit was neither a rubbish pit or a post hole, but possibly a ritual deposit.

*Pit 35.* Another chalk-filled pit exposed in the same cess-pit. Unexcavated.

### *Area III*

*Pit 36.* Exposed in the sides of a foundation trench was a clay-filled pit measuring 5 feet across by 2 feet deep. The fill consisted of a light grey clay with flints, charcoal and mid-first century pottery.

*Pits 37 and 38.* These were both unexcavated, but were revealed by building trenches. In the exposed face of the former were sherds of black cordoned pottery.

*Pit 39.* A small post hole, isolated, containing a few sherds of first century pottery.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that the Atwood site is that of a fairly small but long-established community of typical British pattern. The pottery types recovered from the modern construction work and minor excavation give an almost complete chronology from the Late Bronze Age (600 B.C.) to the beginning of the second century A.D. Why then did our early ancestors inhabit this particular area for 700 years?

The answer to this may possibly lie in the physical location of the site. It has been accepted that the present Limpsfield Road from Sanderstead Church to Botley Hill is on the line of an Iron Age ridgeway. When this site was first inhabited this ridgeway may have already been several centuries old. The site is situated on the edge of a reasonably flat plateau of clay with flints, which, while difficult to farm with primitive equipment, is more fertile than the surrounding chalklands, gravels and sand. As commerce slowly developed the inhabitants must have found themselves on a prosperous trade route. Even after the construction, during the first century A.D., of the countless Roman military and commercial roads this trackway must have served as an alternative route from the South Coast to Londinium and the northern counties.

Articles discovered on the site show some evidence of trade over a wide area, and even imported material finding its way to the settlement. During the middle of the first century A.D. a three-quarter mile long branch road was built to connect the small contemporary farmstead in what is now Kings Wood to the village, or at least, somewhat larger community, now partially beneath the Atwood Primary School, Sanderstead.

## THE POTTERY

## EARLIER PHASES OF THE IRON AGE (IRON AGE A AND SECOND B)

- No. 1. Four sherds of a ware far cruder than any other Iron Age pottery found on the site and possibly of Late Bronze Age date. *Pit 15*.
- No. 2. (Fig. 2, 1). Four sherds of a shouldered bowl, flat rimmed, of dark corky ware. *Pit 10*.
- No. 3. (Fig. 2, 2). Two fragments of the rim of a typical carinated bowl. Grey ware, orange coated and slightly gritted. Cf. *Sy.A.C.*, XLIX (1946), 64. *Pit 10*.
- No. 4. Fragment of vessel similar to No. 3. *Pit 12*.
- No. 5. (Fig. 2, 3). Twenty-four fragments of light brown corky vessel, the rim of which has a flat top with a slight internal overhang. These sherds seem to represent one pot only. *Pit 11*.
- No. 6. (Fig. 2, 4). One piece of rim of a dark corky ware. *Pit 16*.
- No. 7. (Fig. 2, 5). Two fragments of 'piecrust' rim. Cf. *Sy.A.C.*, XLIX (1946), 66. *Pit 5*.
- No. 8. Two pieces of dark bluish corky ware, the holes of which are formed by firing out of particles of chopped straw. This was often added to give strength to the moist clay whilst building the vessel. *Pit 6*.
- No. 9. Black vessel with polished surface. *Pit 16*.
- No. 10. (Fig. 2, 6). Restored base and other fragments of a pedestal urn. Fine buff ware, no grit, outswept rim. Hand-made. *Pit 16*.
- No. 11. (Fig. 2, 7). Three pieces of the base of a hand-made pedestal urn. Light brown ware, gritted. Cf. *Sy.A.C.*, XLIX (1946), 66. *Pit 10*.

## ROMANO-BRITISH

*Samian Ware*. Forms 31 and 18/31 were liberally represented in *Hut 1*. The former had been repaired in antiquity by riveting. The shattered remains of a badly eroded patera of form 18 was found in *Pit 29*.

*Castor Ware*. Two sherds only were found of rouletted ware in *Hut 1*.

*Coarse Ware*.

- Nos. 1, 2 and 3. (Fig. 3, 1, 2 and 3). Fragments of rim and shoulder of large typical mid-first century storage jars of light orange-coloured ware with grey core. Decorated on shoulder with incisions or circular hollows. *Hut 1*.
- No. 4. (Fig. 3, 5). Similar storage jar of light orange ware with grey core. Decorated with band of incisions. Hand-made Mid-first century. *Pit 36*.

- No. 5. Two pieces of an exceptionally large storage jar or amphora. One sherd measured 8 inches by 5 inches by  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inches thick. Gritty buff ware containing many 'bladders' or air pockets. *Hut 1*. A similar sherd was found in *Pit 31*.
- No. 6. (Fig. 3, 4.) Fragments of typical bead rim jar, light brown sandy ware. Hand-made. *Pit 36*.
- No. 7. Imitation of Samian vessel, form Drag. 28. Gritty ware. *Hut 1*.
- No. 8. Very crude pot of hand-made soapy ware. Decorated with combing and incised lines. Mid-first century A.D. *Hut 1*.
- No. 9. Seven fragments of similar vessel to No. 8 but undecorated. Hand-made. Mid-first century A.D. *Hut 1*.

## QUERNS

### *Saddle Querns*

- Five pieces of the upper and lower stones of quern. The lower stone was made from a block of Wealden ironstone, the pecking marks being still visible on the grinding surface. The fragments of the upper stone were of Ightham stone, a light-coloured quartzite material. Second to third century B.C. *Pit 5*.
- Piece of ironstone quern. *Pit 10*.

### *Rotary Querns*

- A segment of the upper stone of a rotary quern, bearing the marks where metal implements had been honed on it after the quern's destruction. Made from Glauconitic sandstone from the Upper Greensand, the nearest beds being at Godstone. *Hut 1*.
- A few pieces only of a Niedermendig lava upper stone.<sup>11</sup> *Hut 1*.
- Upper and lower stone of conglomerate. The upper stone is of a similar material to that to be found in beds on nearby Worms Heath, which is reputed to be the site of a series of Iron Age quern quarries. From spoil of drainage trench. *Pit 20*.
- Half of a Niedermendig lava quernstone.<sup>12</sup> *Hut 2*.

<sup>11</sup> Identified by the excavator.

<sup>12</sup> Identified by the excavator.